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By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

To be continued every THURSDAY.

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Poſt mortem nobilitari volunt. CICERO.

TAKING my walk of obſervation the other day, as is often my cuſtom, I was led by the courſe of my tour into one of our famous hoſpitals. The magnificence of the building, the order and regularity of the houſhold, the multitude that were received, and their ſeveral accommodations, threw me naturally into a very pleaſing contemplation on the extenſive charity of my good countrymen. From one of theſe endowed habitations I was carried on to another, till I believe I made myſelf acquainted with all the public edifices of this nature, that this large and opulent city abounds with. Some of them I found of royal and very ample foundation, others raiſed and maintained by a ſingle and munificent family,

family, others by a joint act of the whole people; all, however, noble in their purpoſes, and admirably adapted for the particular uſes to which they were diſtinctly appropriated. I admired throughout the number of inhabitants thus perfectly provided for in every ſtage of their conditions, together with the continual increaſe of the fund which muſt ſupport ſuch an addition of charges, as I obſerved by the augmentation of apartments, and decorations of more coſt, perhaps, than utility. Charity, thought I, works in ſecret; and theſe matters are of courſe hidden from me. But happening to turn myſelf on one ſide of the chamber, I diſcovered two or three long tablets, with ſeveral names inſcribed in large golden characters, which in my ſimplicity I took for the votive hiſtories of the poor, who had felt the efficacy of relief under theſe merciful manſions: but upon a nearer inſpection I found them to be no other than an enumeration of the very worthy and pious perſons of both ſexes, who annually or occaſionally afforded what it pleaſed them in their liberality to beſtow.

I was reſolved, ſince chance had thrown ſo much information in my way, to peruſe, againſt my cuſtom, the accounts of other families; which practice, however, I thought the leſs impertinent, as I could perceive no other end in their being placed there. Here I diſcovered a contribution that did honour indeed to the names that were annexed to it, and would have done ſo to the greateſt. The immenſe ſums notwithſtanding that were adjoined to the names of ſeveral private perſons, larger than I could have ſuſpected to be within their power, raiſed my curioſity enough to make a farther enquiry into the hiſtory of ſome of theſe very liberal donors. Two of them I accordingly pitched upon to be the ſubject

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my of inveſtigation, as they ſtood upon the liſt; the one a maiden lady, who bequeathed at her death five thouſand pounds to the poor of this houſe: the other, an old gentleman who had ſettled, after his deceaſe, his whole eſtate upon them for ever.

THE good lady's ſtory cannot be better known than by a letter which I received, in the courſe of my enquiry, from her nephew, who with three ſiſters had retired in ſorrow at their aunt's death to a country village, in the northern parts of this kingdom: it is written with ſuch plainneſs and ſimplicity, and is ſo much ſuited to the circumſtances of the writer, that I own myſelf much captivated with my rural correſpondence. The letter is this.

SIR,

IT is neither our inclination, nor I am ſure our intereſt, to conceal any thing from you, who have taken ſo much generous pains in our ſervice. Your offers are received by us all moſt thankfully; but you are miſinformed as to the hundred pounds: for my late aunt has left every ſhilling to the hoſpital, after her funeral expences were diſcharged, which amounted to a good deal, as ſhe was whimſical in many articles that related to her burial. How ſhe paſſed us by in this manner, is ſtill a matter of wonder and perplexity to us, as ſhe continued to the very day of her death to declare that ſhe had nobody to look upon, this ſide of heaven, but her dear nephew and neices. She was accounted always a vain woman; but we thought her very religious, eſpecially as ſhe began to decline. For ſome months before ſhe died, ſhe never miſſed morning or evening ſervice throughout the week, beſides her private devotion in her own houſe, at which none of the family were ſuffered to be preſent.

preſent. The miniſter and ſhe would ſometimes ſtay two or three hours together. She uſed often to diſcourſe upon charity, and ſaid ſhe loved the poor, though I do not remember to have ſeen her beſtow any alms whilſt I lived with her; which ſurprized us the more that ſhe ſhould leave all to them at her death. She has given them her picture too, with orders that it ſhould be hung over the great door of the chapel. Remember, ſir, it is by your own deſire I collect theſe trifling particulars, that concern ourſelves only, and the memory of ſo fantaſtical and unjuſt a woman; for ſuch I muſt call her, notwithſtanding I aſſure you I am perfectly and contentedly reſigned to my lot.

I am, *&c.*

It was with great difficulty I could learn any thing relating to the old gentleman, who is mentioned to have diſpoſed of his whole eſtate in this manner. Thoſe of his blood and neareſt kindred had betaken themſelves to the loweſt ſupports which employment affords to the miſerable; and were either diſperſed in the navy, or in ſuch ſtations, that all enquiries of this ſort were fruitleſs. The very name was obliterated every where, except where it pointed out the diſpoſal of a very conſiderable fortune. All I could gather of him was, that he had increaſed a very good paternal inheritance by every art of thriving in trade, that is ſafely practicable; that he was always called in the city, a hard money-getting man; and that he had left his brothers, ſiſters and grand-children to make their way without the leaſt proviſion or aſſiſtance. There was a ſtatue erecting for him, I found by his own orders, in the hoſpital.

Thus ended my purſuit, which I quitted with as much eagerneſs as it was undertaken. I was diſpleaſed

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over and over with myſelf at my ſearch, and wiſhed for that tranquillity of mind, which is always the portion of a happy ignorance. The ſtream, as I viewed, it was clear; and it is certain I went out of my way to look at the fountain. The generoſity I at firſt contemplated with rapture, was now exchanged for the diſguſt I felt at pride and injuſtice. Were ſtrokes indeed of this nature not ſo ſevere in their effect, there is ſomething ſo ridiculous in theſe oſtentatious charities, and ſuch an abſurdity in appropriations of this ſort, under the circumſtances I have deſcribed, that I confeſs I could indulge a leſs ſerious reflection at the examination of them.

THE two originals above, have many counterparts in this nation; perſons who are frequently ſo very charitable as to reduce their whole families to beggary. The raiſing a church, or endowing an hoſpital, are the two main objects of an elderly ſinner's piety; and no matter by what means, ſo that the end be but accompliſhed. This is ſuch a compendious way of diſcharging all the duties of life at once, and at the expence only of what there is no poſſibility of retaining any longer, that no wonder theſe ſpunges of charity are in ſo much uſe at ſome certain periods, and at ſuch alone.

I WOULD not dwell upon errors which I thought incorrigible, or endeavour to diſcover cauſes without hopes of amending the effects; but I am really of opinion that the grievances here ſet forth, owe their birth chiefly to a few miſtakes, which my acception of the word charity inclines me very much to rectify, for the ſervice eſpecially of theſe pious and liberal benefactors: for ſuch I make no queſtion many of them are, only, as I have ſaid before, they are unfortunate enough to lie under ſome miſtakes. In the firſt place therefore, I ſhall venture to lay it down as a maxim, that there is no ſuch thing